

Remarks/Arguments:

Claims 1-17 are pending in the instant application. In the outstanding Office Action, the Examiner has rejected claims 1, 2, 4, 5, 7-12, 15 and 17 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,397,058 to Thibert et al. (hereinafter, Thibert). The Examiner has further rejected claims 3, 13, 14 and 16 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious over Thibert in view of International Publication No. WO 98/05153 to Alperovich et al (hereinafter, Alperovich).

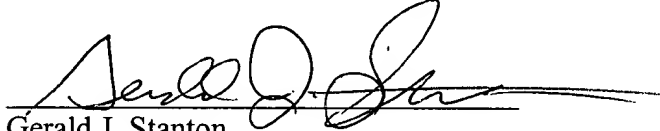
The claim amendments include the following: In claim 1, the Applicant has deleted the terms "such as exchanges" to avoid protracted litigation after issuance concerning claim construction of that term. Applicant has further deleted twice the term "the steps of" to ensure claim 1 does not imply that the separate clauses be executed in the order recited. In claims 9 and 10, the Applicant has deleted unnecessary parenthetical acronyms. In claims 12-15 and 17, Applicant has deleted parenthetical reference numbers that are relics of the foreign priority document. None of these are considered narrowing amendments, and none are done for reasons of patentability.

Applicant respectfully notes that the priority date of the current application is May 5, 1998. While the PCT filing date is April 28, 1999, that PCT filing date claims priority to Finland Patent Application No. 980991 that was filed on May 5, 1998. Conversely, the earliest priority date seen for Thibert is September 9, 1998. Via several voicemail exchanges, the undersigned presented the above dates and the Examiner agreed that Thibert fails to qualify as prior art against the present application. The Examiner's voicemail of March 11, 2004 to the undersigned requested the above priority-date challenge to Thibert be made in a written response. Applicant hereby submits that Thibert fails to qualify as prior art under 35 U.S.C. § 102, and is not available as prior art against the present application. Each and every rejection under 35 U.S.C. §§102 and 103 rely on Thibert, and is therefore moot.

Appl. No. 09/674,101
Amdt. Dated March 22, 2004
Reply to Office Action of December 22, 2003

Applicant submits that the above detailed argument successfully traverses all outstanding rejections. Applicant respectfully requests that the Examiner withdraw all rejections and pass claims 1-17 to issuance without further delay.

Respectfully submitted:


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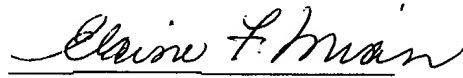
March 22, 2004
Date

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CERTIFICATE OF MAILING

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as first class mail in an envelope addressed to: Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450.

March 22, 2004
Date


Elaine F. Mian